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A Gunshot From Within

I sat lost in the vast sea of my own life events. It was just me and my thoughts. The solid grey concrete walls seemed to echo these thoughts and mirror my emotions. The confined space did not bother me like it had when I first arrived. The lush picturesque landscape of my Austria seemed a mere distant memory now. The few of my remaining lowly possessions only reminded me of the tainted past.

The brain seemingly contains thousands of images, thoughts and memories, but mine acted like a piano with one note and continued to linger on the same image.

Her face.

Just one moment continued to play over and over again. Her dancing eyes gleamed with the essence of pure freedom and her soft demurring smile could not exit my mind.

As an infamous baker in my lovely city of Vienna, any other variety of food here seemed bland and lacked taste. I could feel my body going weak with malnutrition, a malady I never had to experience in my humble bakery favored by aristocrats. Aristocrat- my mind circled back around to Katherina. Even the sound of her name leaving my lips painted my dull world in magnificent hues. Even despite my current condition in the Terezin Prison, I did not regret his drastic actions of the past. I knew I was foolish to pursue such a fine breed of woman so affluently above my class. If I had acted upon rational thoughts, I would not be here in this wretched black, or rather, grey hole of desolation where I find myself wasting away. That first moment I caught sight of her-when the bell of my little shop jingled and she stepped in the door, passed through my mind, when suddenly, my knees began to quake and buckle under me. Just before the world waned in my eyes and I passed out, I felt the prison guards roughly seize my arms and legs and haul me away.

I awoke on a strange bed, acutely uncomfortable, but then again, any change of scenery was a welcome view. I glanced around and assessed that I was in the prison hospital. The burning sensation of my forehead and dagger-like stomach pains confirmed this observation. The man lying in the bed beside me had a nasty gash on the side of his head to accompany his large muscular arms. His chiseled features and strong jaw were clenched in agony and his strong hands were squeezed in a fist. Needless to say he looked far from anyone I would normally fraternize with. Despite the fact that any company in this god-forsaken place would be an appreciated companion, I decided to avoid any contact with this one. The other hospital beds were occupied by sleeping prisoners who did not appear to be in a much-improved condition than the first guy, and the bed directly next to me was vacant. Well it looked like it would be just me, and my torturous thoughts again. I began to settle back into my recurring painful memories.

It was 1909 and I was 25, working as a baker in my beloved little shop on Dorotheergasse. Each day the aromas of my famous Altwiener Apfelstrudel and mouth-watering pastries wafted through and penetrated the senses, a sense of proud accomplishment sang in my mind. My father scoffed at my dreams of becoming a baker. His plans included me trapped on our family farm barely making enough to keep us afloat. My greatest weakness and strength had always been striving for the nearly intangible. The moment I locked eyes with my beautiful Katharina, I knew. I knew she was from a higher class, where they probably ate with silver spoons and maids acquiesced to their every whim, but my abysmal love overwhelmed any rational thought.

A nurse entered the decrepit room with watery soup and a newspaper. As I sipped my meager dinner I glanced at the headline. It told of the Archduke’s future plans of overseeing military movements in Sarajevo. Archduke Ferdinand was the fatherly figure I had always craved as a child, who guided me and strengthened my love for Austria. He too had sought after a love restricted by society. Yet him being a man of high-power didn’t end up in prison for following the path of his heart. However, he too had to pay the steep price. I constantly followed his actions in the newspaper back home. With the encouragement of the Tsar Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm II, he married the Countess Sophia against the wishes of his father. However he fathered his children knowing they would never be able to rise to his place in society. I closed my eyes as the thoughts of sneaking through Vienna’s ancient streets with my beautiful Katherina, as we too dodged the hindering grasp of society, carried me into a light sleep.

I am still laying in creaking hospital bed with increasingly sharp pains running through every inch of my body. I have no sense of how much time has passed. This time, the bed directly on my right was occupied by a medium built man with short dark curly hair and dark eyes. By the looks of him he was in his late teens or early twenties but his face told the story of a man beyond his years. He noticed my conscious presence and glanced over at me.

“Hello” I spoke.

“Hi”, he said in a rough accent. I placed him as a Croat or Serbian.

“I am Karl Reinstadler,” I offered. After an uncomfortable pause of silence I continued, “and you are...?”

“Gavrilo,” he uttered without mention of a surname. It was clear I would not be getting much more information from him and I closed my eyes and drifted into another slumber.

When I awoke my mysterious companion was no longer resting in the neighboring bed. My favorite brown haired nurse, who had recently been my only source of companionship lately, entered the room to check on my condition. I had enjoyed a exchanging a few pleasantries earlier and had shared my admiration of Archduke Ferdinand. She leaned over to me and shaking, whispered, “The Archduke has been assassinated and the murderer is being kept *here* within the prison walls”.

My eyes widened and my whole body went limp out of shock. She told me she would bring me more news when possible. My brain pounded and I felt like I had just lost a member of the family. Who could have possibly hated my beautiful country and its great leader so much? Anger surged through my body until my illness overcame me and I once again fell off into a coma-like slumber.

I awoke with unrest and shifted my body when I felt a crinkling of paper beneath the thin stained off-white sheets. The nurse must have followed through with obtaining me more information. I slowly pulled out an Austrian newspaper with blaring headlines declaring the assassination of the Archduke. My throat began to close again as I started to skim the article and perspiration dripped down my forehead. The shocking news began to sink in as the black print on the page began to unravel the story and cement an awful reality. Being a strong man of stature and mental capacity, I surprised myself when I let out a loud embarrassing sob. I was glad the man that I had become barely acquainted with in the past week or so, was not present. However, only moments later he was wheeled in looking sicklier than before. I continued the article, convinced I could withstand any break of stoic emotion.

*An assassination attempt had previously been made when the Archduke and his wife, Sophia, were entering Sarajevo along Appel Quay road. The road was lined with citizens welcoming the couple. The previous attempt at assassination was made when a grenade was thrown at the car of the Archduke but luckily was evaded by fast and skillful driving. It unfortunately hit the next car in the procession, and many citizens were injured as well as the occupants of the car. In fact, the Archduke was on his way to the hospital to visit those injured in his procession, when the assassin, Gavrilo Princip spotted him. Under several unfavorable circumstances the Archduke was shot in the jugular vein and his wife Countess Sophia was shot and murdered as well. Because of the previous attempt at murder, it was not encouraged that Sophia accompany her husband in the same car on the way to the hospital. As a true testament of her undying love, she insisted, “As long as the Archduke shows himself in public today I will not leave him”. As a precaution, the driver was supposed to be informed to take Appel Quay and avoid the City Center. However the driver was informed too late and was in the process of backing up when the Princip happened to be at a Cafe nearby and seized the opportunity to carry out his mission. Afterwards, he attempted suicide by faulty cyanide and later by shooting himself but was apprehended.*

I stopped reading, feeling slightly choked up again. Suddenly a cold realization hit me. The man who had been wheeled in and was currently dozing on the bed next to me-*he had a Serbian accent*. The murderer was *here and his name was Gavrilo.* A wave of nausea overcame me. I was sharing a room with the assassin of the ruler of Austria. I began yelling and jumped out of bed and shook him awake.

“HOW COULD YOU” I defiantly accused. He swatted my hand away and slowly opened his eyelids and revealed his hollowed and spiteful eyes.

“For Serbia,” he spat back at me, “For revolution. For reasons your little Austrian mind could not understand. It needed to be done”.

My voice was hoarse. “Needed to be done?” Can you not imagine his children happily waving good-bye to their parents, unaware that that in the next week they would become orphans? Can you not imagine leaving an entire country wounded and hurt with the loss of a great leader? Can you not see conceive the notion of losing the sole reason for existence and ceasing to have companionship ever again?”

He sneered and shot back, “You know nothing of loss. I have had nine siblings, yet only known two of them past infancy. I have lived out each day knowing it could be my last. Each shortness of breath that stabs my chest pierces my heart and reiterates the existence of my meaningless life. I did what I did because I knew it to be the best for my country. You aren’t the only one that loves their county. You aren’t the only one who knows pain”.

“Then, how could you stand over the Archduke and his wife, aware that what you were you about to do to them would inflict the same misery you had experienced,” I could feel my voice quake as I softly, but with indignant strength asked the assassin.

“You do not understand! This was not about me,” For the first time his eyes shone with reminiscence albeit apathetical, “I cannot forgot the moment the landed me in this hellhole. The Archduke had first arrived along the main road, greeted with spectators. As I’m sure you read from that newspaper,” he nodded at the crumpled article clenched in my hand, “a failed assassination was made before I got to him. I could not attempt another assassination moments after their contingent was on high alert. I had retreated to a quiet cafe on the corner of the city center. I was blinded by anything that was not what I was there to accomplish. I glanced at my watch incessantly and could not focus on any particular point of interest for more than a few seconds. It was now my mind weighed down with a string of unanswerable questions. I felt trapped in a glass box as I desperately reached out towards what I wanted on the outside. I happened to look up and stood aghast. I could not believe my luck. The Archduke and his wife were riding through the city center. I heard the General riding with them bark orders at the driver, upon which the he commenced backing up the vehicle. I took several strong strides over until I was about five feet from the car. I pulled out my revolver and aimed it directly at them. The bullet shattered the air and punctured the Archduke’s neck. A perfect shot. I fired a second shot at the car. My thoughts were fair away from murder at that point. The second bullet hit the Archduke’s wife and she writhed in agony. As he gasped out with a dying breath, he struggled to emit the words, *“Sophie dear, Sophie dear. Don’t die, stay alive for our children!”.*  My breath left me again and I groped about for my pill of cyanide. A crowd swarmed around me and I turned my gun around and looked it straight down the barrel when bystanders from the crowd grabbed my arm and apprehended the gun,” A wicked smile crept across his sick face and he added, “I will die for my love”.

My mind flashed back to Katherina. I was transported back to the last day I would ever have with her. *We had escaped to the outskirts of Vienna and we rested along the edge of the Danube. Her twinkling eyes gazed into mine for what felt like an eternity but must have only been a few seconds. My smile seemed eternal and it lit up the rest of my body with tingling warmth. She flashed a smile back at me and dipped her toes in the river. I wrapped my arms around her and felt that I was frozen in a state of perfect bliss as everyone else’s inconsequential life continued in a world far away from mine. However, my world suddenly crashed when I heard yelling and the thud of footsteps close by. A man wrenched my arms encircling her and yanked both of us up. He tore me away from her as tears flooded down each of our cheeks and we shared a final moment. Time was suspended as I hoarsely whispered ‘I love you’ and squeezed her outstretched hand that was still clasped in mine. The tips of our fingers separated as fate inevitably caught up with us.* I was certain tears were streaming down my face now, although I wasn’t completely aware of what my body was doing anymore.

I pictured the Archduke stuck between living and dying as he cried out his last wishes to the woman whom he sacrificed his future. I imagined the cold-blooded murderer in the bed beside me, standing in front of both of them, killing himself as he killed them. Yet even at that moment he has already dead. I was not certain when the world waned in his eyes like it had for me the day I lost Katherina, but the lifeless glaze in his eyes was something all too familiar. We both lived in the same world that had ended for us years ago, but still kept us sustained and suppressed in agony.

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Attribution of Research

1. "Austria in 1914." *Spartacus Educational*. Web. 05 Feb. 2012.

* Tsar Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm helped convince the Archduke’s father to let him marry below his social position
* Gavrilo Princip struggled with Tuberculosis as he was young
* Princip and fellow member of Black Hand both had Tuberculosis, they were committed to killing themselves after completing assassination
* The street the Archduke arrived on was Apple Quay
* First assassination attempt was a bomb thrown at the Archduke’s car
* The bomb hit the car behind the Archduke, Archduke’s car evaded bomb with quick driving
* Quote from the Countess Sophie, “As long as the Archduke shows himself in public today I will not leave him”
* Archduke’s car was going through city center when General Poitiorek told the driver to take a different route
* Gavrilo happened to be at a cafe nearby when the car was in reverse
* After assassination, Gavrilo was grabbed by crowd and later police officers
* Quote from the Archduke, “Sophie dear! Sophie dear! Stay alive for our children!”
* The Archduke was born in 1863
* He met his wife at a dance
* In order to marry the Archduke, the girl had to be descended from the House of Habsburg or ruling Dynasty
* General Potiorek invited the Archduke and his wife to Sarajevo to watch army maneuvers
* The Archduke was not considering accepting the invitation until the general made it clear that his wife was welcome as well

1. Austrian Last Names." *- Meet My Last Name*. Web. 15 Feb. 2012.

* The main character’s last name is Reinstadler

1. Bley, Edgar S. *Austria-- in Pictures*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 1991. Print.

* Vienna was famous for its pastries and coffee
* Austria had a strict social hierarchy
* The Danube river ran through Vienna

1. “Gavrilo Princip.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Vol. 21. Detroit: Gale, 2001. *Gale Power Search*. Web. 05 Feb. 2012.

* Quote from Gavrilo Princip, “I am a Yugoslav nationalist aiming for the unification of all Yugoslavs and I do not care what form of state, but it must be free from Austria”
* Gavrilo was detained after murder
* Gavrilo attempted to kill himself after assassination with Cyanide and then by shooting himself
* Stood five feet away from Archduke’s car, as it was in reverse
* Extremely loyal to Black Hand, no remorse
* Poor health, solitary confinement in prison and then moved to jail hospital because of Tuberculosis
* Was given cyanide, a revolver and a grenade to commit murder
* His mother had 9 children but only 3 survived past infancy
* He was imprisoned in Terezin prison

1. "Growth of the City - History of Vienna." *Wien.at*. Web. 06 Feb. 2012.

* A street name in Vienna was Dorotheergasse

1. Helmreich, E.C. "Franz Ferdinand (1863-1914)." *Encyclopedia Americana*. Grolier Online, 2012. Web. 15 Jan. 2012.

* The Archduke married down to Countess Sophie Chotek
* Archduke was attending army maneuvers in Sarajevo when murdered

1. Stern, Fred. "Vienna 1900: Between Dream and Reality." *World and I*. Gale Power Search, Apr. 2011. Web. 17 Jan. 2012.

* The center of the Austrian Empire was Vienna
* Aristocracy controlled wealth, power
* Vienna favored upper class with estates
* Vienna had a lot of baking and pastry
* It had wide boulevards

\*Some of the events in this story were written with creative liberty. I gave some characterization to Gavrilo Princip that agree with the facts, but did not actually occur in history.